

Dismissing with a Smile: Postcolonial Comic Subversion

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Postcolonialism may be described as a dynamic discourse that not only critiques colonizer's version of the colonized but also tries to interrogate it, subvert it, and even replace it with a view to asserting the unique identity of the colonized community before and/or after the independence. As colonial ideology is an ideology that assumes the centrality of the colonizer and, *ipso facto* the marginalized state of the colonized, Postcolonialism tries to re-configure the power relation by centralizing whatever had been treated as Other in the Centre-Other binary. It is not a monolithic discourse, nor is it the brainchild of a single theorist who designed the entire structure of this multi-layered edifice in all its diverse

ramifications. If Frantz Fanon punctured the missionary myth by exposing the evils of colonial subjugation, it was Edward Said who unmasked the conspiratorial design of colonial ideology that sought to legitimize Western domination over more than three-fourths of the inhabited territory of the globe. Said revealed how the racial superiority of the Europeans was negatively constructed by strategic misrepresentation of the Orient, by spreading canards about the passion, prejudice, superstition and savagery of the native inhabitants of the colonies.

Originally an overtly political worldview, Postcolonialism has spread to the field of culture as it is always the native culture that bears the brunt of imperial domination. Since colonialism is as much political as cultural, all components of culture—language, history, myth etc.—having any relation to the issue of domination and resistance come under the purview of Postcolonial discourse. Any text that is planned to undermine an authoritative discourse constructed to legitimize hegemony may be designated a Postcolonial text. In order to counter biased judgment of the imperialists, Postcolonialism promotes re-examination of canons and valorization of native textual output. In their concluding chapter of *The Empire Writes Back*, ‘More english than English’, Ashcroft et al have mapped the “process of literary decolonization” which involves “a radical dismantling of the European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses” (Ashcroft, Grif-

fiths and Tiffin 2002, 220). As construction of self-image is also a repudiation of the imperial version, Postcolonialism addresses the question of identity and self-determination. Since the language of the imperialists was imposed on the native people almost everywhere in the colonies, Postcolonialism tries to find out how language becomes a resistance-site for the colonized, how they try to reject, replace, distort, adapt and even creolize the language of the colonizer. The colonizers by and large are proud of the purity of their ethno-cultural identity. Therefore, as part of resistance strategy, Postcolonialism glorifies hybridity which makes the identity of both the colonizer and the colonized rather ambiguous and ambivalent.

Postcolonialism also addresses several other related issues about domination, disempowerment and disavowal of authority. T. Vijaya Kumar objects to the use of hyphen in the word 'Postcolonial' which, in his opinion, splits the word and defers interrogation of colonial history and its legacy (Kumar 1996, 196). Robert Young problematizes the Postcolonial discourse by hierarchizing the Other, by showing that India has enjoyed brighter footlight of attention than Africa in Postcolonial studies: "In comparison to the extensive work done on India, meanwhile, Africa remains comparatively neglected... today India quite clearly retains that position of pride of place, the jewel in the crown of colonial-discourse analysis" (Young 1995, 165-66). Gayatri

Chakravorty Spivak contends that subaltern voice, because it is re-presented, continues to be muted, or even when articulate, remains unheard: “the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject...will, in the long run, cohere with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization. And the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever” (Spivak 1994, 90). As colonization is about domination and exertion of power, all issues from national identity formed through negotiation with the colonizer to the issue of Western universalist version of gender-based marginalization are treated as veritable Postcolonial issues. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, has faulted Western feminist discourse for looking upon all women of the globe as a homogeneous community to the utter oblivion of other parameters of discrimination like race, class and caste. For ignoring the “material and historical heterogeneities” of the experiences of Third World women, the image that has emerged is “an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse” (Mohanty 1995, 242).

Leela Gandhi calls Postcolonialism “a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of ...interrogating the colonial past” (Gandhi 1998, 4). Harish Trivedi has established that one meaning of the prefix ‘post-’ in Postcolonialism is *repudiatory* (three others being *after*, *later*,

higher) (Trivedi 1996, 126). Robert J.C. Young also has this sense in mind when he defines Postcolonialism from the point of view social activism that is “both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice” (Young 2016, 58). Protest and resistance in any form are, therefore, considered the hallmark of Postcolonialism. The focus of Postcolonial discourse is less on the colonizer but more on the colonized. How the people of the colonies were subjugated and compelled to cooperate with the subjugators, how their pre-colonial identity and indigenous culture got gradually erased, the colonial hangover they have been experiencing even after independence and the modes of protest against this unwanted imposition – all these figure in Postcolonial discourse. Homi Bhabha has re-defined the colonizer-colonized relation and shown that due to prolonged contactual co-existence, the relation has mutated during the period of colonial subjugation. Bhabha recognizes the interdependence of the colonizer and the colonized and shows how the binary between Ourselves and Others disappears in the Third Space.

Ever since the publication of the English translation of Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World* (1968), carnivalesque has become a buzz word for cultural criticism. It has become so fashionable that in recent past Kolkata witnessed the staging of a play *Bakhtin Bakhtin* in which the eponymous protagonist keeps a musical band suggestively named ‘Carnival’ – its songs used for the carnivalesque

purpose of authority-baiting. Bakhtin used the term carnivalesque to describe the various aspects of comic topsy-turvy of social order in medieval Europe and how its spirit found its articulation in the writings of the French novelist Francois Rabelais (1532-1564). In order probably to rebel against the monologism of discourse in contemporary Russia that had tried to asphyxiate free thinking, Bakhtin stressed the importance dialogism in discourse. The essence of dialogism is neutralization voice-centrality through heteroglossia/ polyphony, through creation of diversity of voices. If Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogism' and 'heteroglossia' creates space for plurality of voices, his notion of carnivalesque makes us aware of the subtle strategy of subversion of dominant discourse. In *Torn Halves* Robert Young has rightly observed, "Bakhtin found dialogism embodied in carnival" (Young 1996, 49). The term carnivalesque has struck root in Postcolonial discourse and is used to describe programmatic subversion of prescribed hierarchies by foregrounding the subaltern.

Power in its positive sense means the ability to act and in its negative sense implies capacity to exert control. In the latter sense it is an instrument of subjugation. Foucauldian notion of power is that power should not be mistaken for a single source of domination; it is but a multi-pronged instrument of attack that manifests itself through all forms of social relationship. To quote Foucault: "power must be understood in the first in-

stance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization... Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978, 92-93). As power always thrives by subjugating others, power in any form is to be resisted to create a space for identity, individual or racial. Foucault who has written elaborately on power, its source and its various modes of operation justly maintains that in every society norms that govern life are set by those who wield power. Realignment of power structure calls for infraction of socially recommended codes. Peter Stallybrass & Allon White who in their scholarly book *The Politics & Poetics of Transgression* have explored the issues of limit and transgression, have shown that since transgression re-structures the alignment of power, wherever there is dominance, there is transgression. It may be Faustian which is confrontational or carnivalesque which is comically subversive. The holi in India is an occasion for comic transgression when social hierarchies are suspended and for sheer diversion at other's expense people can taint others' face and dress without having any fear of chastisement. In a very interesting article 'The Pleasure of the Carnavalesque: Performing the Rituals during *Shiv Gajan*' Sayanti Mondal has written on the “carnavalesque quotient” of the gajan festival of Bengal. Held annually at the end of the Bengali year, it is a carnivalesque moment for boundary-crossing without being offensive. It is an occasion for unbounded revelry

involving the sacred and the profane. During the festival, body-centric acts having mystic nuances like skin-piercing, walking barefoot upon burning embers, jumping on thorn-bed, are indulged in. The underprivileged lower caste people who in other time debarred from entering the temple, can participate in fasting and penance and become *sannyasi*, a role that temporarily upgrades them socially, for even the upper caste Brahmins find them venerable for those days.

In the Middle Ages, carnival was an occasion for playing Go as You Like at the social sphere. Restrictions suspended for a while, people could indulge in activity which at other times would be considered a transgression. It was a time for clowns mimicking kings, a time for casting off all tokens of so called civilized manners. Drunkenness and sensual indulgence replaced sobriety and abstinence as norm and un-sophisticated revelry would not be objected to or frowned upon. Three principal characteristics of the carnivalesque are odd coupling that disregards social hierarchy (say, the Owl marrying the Pussy Cat in Edward Lear's poem), facetious eccentricity that is considered inappropriate behavior, and misalliance or assortment of mutually exclusive elements. Incidentally, Bakhtin has shown that up to the Middle Ages both the official (sophisticated) and the carnival (sensual) aspects of human life were accepted as normal: "Both these lives were legitimate but separated by strict temporal boundaries" (Bakhtin 1984, 130). So-

ciety even created space for shifting from one to the other during the carnival period – a time for crowning the pauper and hurling darts of jibes with impunity at the respectable. But this scope was gradually restricted and this resulted in the compartmentalization of the profane and the pure, the prohibited and the permitted. In order to isolate the comic, it was branded as ‘folk’ which implies that it was not considered part of the mainstream which represented the voice of the authority. This ghettoization of the ribald is evident from the Renaissance exclusivist theory of beauty which would not concede any space to the disagreeable. The carnival offers an alternative aesthetic theory by approving body-centric activity like nose-blowing, belching, farting, defecation heretofore not considered very civilized or dignified. It has been argued that the carnival was an occasion for ‘ritualized transgression’ – a temporary connivance at social barriers than real dissolution of the invisible border of demarcation. This view has found voice in Terry Eagleton’s safety-valve theory which refers to the rather conservative function of the carnivalesque: “Carnival after all, is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art” (Eagleton 1981, 148). In short, by allowing some degree of transgression for a specified period of time, the carnivalesque indulgence blunts the real zeal to overthrow the system that enchains and degrades.

Even if this be true, Postcolonial discourse seeks to examine how this limited freedom for crossing the boundary has been used for the purpose of resistance – for railing at any type of hegemonic power. Protest against domination is not confined to politics only, nor does it always manifest itself in the form of organized activism under party banner. Sometimes the very reflection that the oppressor should be confronted takes the form of a protest. For example, in ‘The Naked King’ the Bengali poet Nirendranath Chakrabarty ridicules the spinelessness of the cringing sycophants who clap in praise of the obscene spectacle of the king’s nakedness. The speaker laments that the outspoken child who can face the king and ask ‘Hey, where are your clothes, king?’ is missing. There is a touch of the Postcolonial subversive comic in the lines where the poet sneers at the slavish, obsequious attitude of the flatterers who even obligingly try to justify the shameless show by saying that the king has put on a costly dress which is invisible because it is super-fine. There are various social acts and festivities which embody remonstrance against cultural domination and hence are Postcolonial in character. In his article ‘Between Elite Hysteria and Subaltern Carnavalesque: The Politics of Street-food in the City of Calcutta’ Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay, for example, has shown how as part of ‘civilizing process’ certain food items were expurgated from the Bengali palate. Subsequently how as part of counter-hegemonic cultural enterprise which may be described as the ‘return of the repressed’ (Mukhopadhyay

2004, 47), these re-incarnated in streetfood (read *fuchka*) not only to add to gastronomic pleasure but to assert as it were the triumph of subalternity. Often an odd dress or similar other cultural symbols are used for the purpose of subversion. In the forties of the twentieth century, zoot suit, a type of male dress with excesses of cloth and sartorial intricacy which gave a comic touch to the look of the wearer, emerged as a symbol of Mexican identity. No wonder that Luis Valdez uses the dress name as the title of one of his resistant plays written to assert Chicano cultural identity against American domination. Interrogating the ethnic stereotypes framed by the imperialists can also be a form of Postcolonial resistance. For example, in his play *Bandido* Luis Valdez uses the character of Tiburcio Vásquez, negatively stereotyped by the Americans as a notorious bandit, for deconstructing the hegemonic myth about the benevolent outlaw.

All these modes of subversion are no doubt powerful, but the most effective mode in Postcolonial context, a context of asymmetric power equation, seems to be the art of comic disruption. This is because in a situation involving domination and subjugation, the dominated usually avoid confrontational resistance for which matching vigour is required. They nevertheless register their protest through satiric laughter. The advantage of laughter is that what cannot be dislodged by force can be laughed at, which is why laughter is also a form of resistance, an effective means of dismissal of author-

ity. Incidentally laughter is a typically human response to a grotesque spectacle, incident or remark. It is human because only man is capable of distinguishing between norm and absence of norm. Without this distinctive acumen it is impossible to respond to a tickling joke, a ludicrous event or a hilarious situation, say Mrs Hardcastle mistaking her own husband for a notorious highwayman in *She Stoops to Conquer*, or Cecily in *The Importance of Being Earnest* talking about her engagement, separation and reconciliation as per code of romantic love even before meeting her lover. Although when we laugh we invariably laugh at somebody, Umberto Eco distinguishes between comic laughter (a decrepit woman using make-up) and humorous laughter (Don Quixote unable to understand that chivalric ideals have become dated): “In comedy, we laugh at the character. In humor, we smile because of the contradiction between the character and the frame the character cannot comply with. But we are no longer sure that it is the character who is at fault. Maybe the frame is wrong” (Eco 1984, 8). In short, Umberto Eco thinks that although both the types of laughter involve criticism, in humour it is directed not towards an individual but at the frame. Since laughter issues from detection of deviation from norm and since norms are set by those who wield power, laughter is defiant by its very nature. The stronger form of resistant laughter manifests itself in the form of satire. But as it is unsparing and iconoclastic, only the powerful can use it against the oppressor. What is left to those who are at

the receiving end in the structure of power, is humour and irony. Humour and irony gain in nuance what satire gains in vigour. Hence although less caustic than satire these are broader in scope. In their introduction to the authoritative edited volume *Cheeky Fictions: Laughter and the Postcolonial*, Reichl and Stein have justly maintained that 'laughter is a central element, humour a key feature, disrespect a vital textual strategy of Postcolonial cultural practice' (Reichl and Stein 2005, 1).

During the period of colonial rule in India, cartoonists explored their skills to comically undermine the western values and ways of life. Under the nom de plume "Bamboo" Wilayat Ali (1885-1918) caricatured foot-licking *jeebhujurs* and the "England Returned" Indians who would abhor their vernacular and boast of having completely forgotten their mother tongue for having stayed abroad just for a few months. The cartoonist's butt of attack was no doubt the elite Indian hobnobbing with the colonial rulers. But what accounts for the Postcolonial significance of the cartoons is that this weakness for the British culture in preference to one's own struck the cartoonist as a reprehensible fault. Not in painting alone, in literature also the stooges of the authority figure are often sharply travestied. In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow* one of the ministers of the despotic Ruler dreams of wielding absolute power like his master. His notion of absolute dictatorial power has been exposed in a humorous vein "Oh, imagine it: when you say, Wipe

your noses, a million handkerchiefs are raised to a million noses” (Thiongo’ 2007, 414). The fearful network of totalitarian repressive machinery has been unmasked in the novel in a style that is literally facetious. For example, one of the ministers is sent abroad for surgical enlargement of eye so that no enemy can be lie beyond the ken of surveillance; another is to undergo ear-surgery which is expected to broaden the range of hearing so that no conspiratorial whisper can escape unheard.

Since colonialism caused dispersal of the seeds of culture, the location of culture needs to be traced to the metamorphosed incarnations of those seeds. In tracing it, Bhabha talks about the hybridized state of Postcolonial culture and the ambivalence in the relationship of the colonizer & the colonized. Ambivalence helps us distinguish between the ethnic identity which is deterministically closed and the vibrant cultural identity which evolves through interface between the colonizer and the colonized. The colonizer encourages the subject to mimic the master in expectation that in the process the traces of the subject’s indigenous self will gradually get purged. But as any re-production involves invariable departure from the original in some contours—it is ‘almost the same but not quite’ (Bhabha 1994, 86)—mimicry begets mockery and the original form gets caricatured in its replication. Bhabha, therefore, categorizes mimicry as ‘at once resemblance and menace’ (Ibid) and justly observes that “the menace of mimicry is its double

vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 1994, 87). The colonizer wants a mimic man but what happens is just the opposite. Narcissism becomes counterproductive, for the new figure proves not to be a clone but a parody of the original. It is a threat to the colonizer as in it he finds his own identity degraded, which was the least he intended at the time of cloning his self-image. It is precisely for this reason that in Postcolonial Studies Ashcroft et al have maintained that Mimicry “locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in its control of the behaviours of the colonized” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2013, 155).

Small wonder that in Postcolonial studies mimicry which operates through comic disfigurement, is a favourite strategy of subversion. Incidentally, in judging mimicry one must not lose sight of its bi-focality, the doubleness of perspective which may operate on three levels: 1) the mimic’s identity, what one thinks oneself to be and what one appears to others; 2) what the colonizer wants a mimic to be and what it actually turns out to be; 3) what the author’s attitude to the mimic is – whether the mimic is projected as an inferior clown or a Frankenstein empowered to cross the boundary set by the master. The points may be examined in the light Khushwant Singh’s short story “Karma”, a story about the discomfiture of Sir Mohan, a snobbish Indian who maintains distance from his countrymen to impress everybody as a model

sahib. Educated in England, he has picked up the external tokens of colonial culture – he rarely speaks Hindustani, speaks good English in British accent, wears a Balliol tie, smokes English cigarettes, sips only Scotch and reads no newspaper but *The Times*. Khushwant in his inimitable serio-comic style shows that although Sir Mohan projects himself as a British clone, he is miles away from the pattern he treats as ideal and on which he models himself. At the railway station the two English soldiers are not at all impressed by his words “I say, I say surely”. Although pronounced in Oxford accent, the words ‘almost sounded like English’ to their ears. What Sir Mohan values as self-worth, strike the two soldiers as odd, as clear from Khushwant’s dismissive qualifier ‘almost’. Sir Mohan fails to keep in mind that “to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English’ (Bhabha 1994, 87). Sir Mohan may be proud of his Anglicized self which he thinks is a flawless replica of the master’s self, but he impresses the British soldiers as nothing better than a buffoon. This illustrates the first type of bi-focality of mimicry. The second level of bi-focality is the ironic reversal of intention which makes mimicry a menace. This is best illustrated by Caliban’s words to Prospero:

You taught me language; and my profit on’t
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language (*The Tempest* 1.2. 364-
66)

When the English officially promoted the study of English in India, the professed aim was to create a body of ‘interpreters’, who, as Macaulay envisaged it, would be “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Macaulay 1835). In Khushwant’s story, the British soldiers, despite the impeccable English of Sir Mohan, look upon him as a ‘nigger’ who is unfit to be a co-traveller. So they command him: “Ek dam jao – get out” (Singh 2010). When the soldiers start flinging his suitcase, his thermo flask, his briefcase on to the platform, Sir Mohan can tolerate no more. In his fury, he shouts a threat at them: ‘I’ll have you arrested – guard, guard!’ (Ibid). This “was too much of the King’s (English) for them” (Ibid). As imperial programming has failed, as the mimic behavior has gone beyond the master’s control, one of them slaps him on the face and then the soldiers together push him out of the compartment. The third level of this doubleness of perspective is the author’s attitude to the mimic and his role. It is here that the Postcolonial significance of the text most strongly felt. At the end of Khushwant’s story we find Sir Mohan’s wife spitting betel saliva through the window of the running train while Sir Mohan stands stupefied on the platform. This helps us grasp Khushwant’s attitude to the mimic which is admittedly an attitude of derisive disapproval. The same negative attitude marks the style of writers who make fun of Baboo English and Butler English. One example of each type given by Jagadisan and Ali is worth quot-

ing: “Hoping to have the honour of throwing myself at your goodness’s philanthropic feet” (Jagadisan and Ali 2004, 38); “off the fan” (Jagadisan and Ali 2004, 39). The amusement is mostly always at the expense of the subject using the language. But in most Postcolonial texts the author also tacitly approves the distortion and sides with the distorter. In such cases, appropriation of the master’s tongue becomes a mode of writing back, which makes the centre’s power of control somewhat uncertain. In *The God of Small Things*, for example, the twins Estha and Rahel refuse to co-operate with the family desperate to domesticate them in the name of good grooming. But being children they cannot straightforwardly go against the elders of the family who behave as imperial subjugators. They register their defiance in a number of amusing ways like reading a story book (*The Adventures of Susie Squirrel*) backwards. This worries their tutor Miss Mitten who remarks that she has seen “Satan in their eyes”. But even this cannot stop them, for they immediately invert the order of letters in the individual words of the phrase “nataS ni rieht seye” (Roy 1998, 60). It is obvious that Roy sides with Estha and Rahel and, instead of faulting their learning skill, she appreciates their clever art of subversion.

Postcolonial studies celebrate ambivalence of identity as it weakens the grip of domination and creates a space for resistance. In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy critiques the Western cultural invasion in a passage

that deals with the issue of ambivalent identity. Having watched the classic film *The Sound of Music* at Abhilash Talkies, Estha and Rahel self-critically reflect on their own peccadilloes. The twins, who have been taught to idealize Western manners, cannot decide whether shivering legs, blowing spit bubbles or gobbling (Roy 1998, 106) which they like so much would qualify as acceptable manners by European standard, represented by the children of the film and Sophie Mol. While their anxiety makes us laugh, it also makes us aware how Postcolonial identity can be constructed through indulgence in what is forbidden. In *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World*, R. G Khanduri mentions another form of ambivalent identity that played its role in embarrassing the colonizers. Political cartoons drawn under British tutelage in the pre-independent period created an ambivalent identity of the cartoonist for the rulers. Even when the authority was the target, the colonizers could not help being indifferent to the art of subversion because of this ambivalent identity. The cartoonist must be accepted either as an imitator or an inventor. If recognized as imitator, it would be wrong to punish the cartoonist, for he is just a replicator. On the other hand, to accept him as an inventor would be to indirectly acknowledge the creativity of the native. Once this is done, the native would move from the periphery to the centre and all the colonial myth of native backwardness together with the so called civilizing mission of the colonizer would collapse inevitably.

One mode of Postcolonial resistance is inversion which consists in the strategy of turning an authority symbol upside down. Unlike subversion which aims at dismantling the centre-other binary, inversion carnivalesquely reverses the role of the dominator and the dominated: the king falls upon his knees before a beggar or the master carries his servant on his shoulder. In Satyajit Ray's short story 'Asamanjababur Kukur' ('The Dog of Asamanjababu', first published in Bengali in *Sharadiya Sandesh* in 1978) there is an excellent use of the trope of inversion. In the story Asamanjababu delights in equating the English with the dog-species and wants to own a dog to be the master of one who can follow commands given in English. He chooses an English name, 'Brownie', for an extraordinary dog that he owns. Brownie is a dog with superior intelligence and can critically recognize each deviation from the norm which is the source of laughter. There is a comic role-reversal in the way the dog reacts to every incident involving human embarrassment – someone slipping on to the floor from a broken chair, curd spilling accidentally from a curd-pot, an umbrella getting blown off by storm or words getting stuck in the mouth of a stutterer. Each of these amuses Brownie and elicits a response in the form of laughter that ranges from giggle to guffaw. The height of sarcasm is reached at the end of the story when the dog bursts into sardonic laughter at the proposal of an American who, under the stupid impression that everything is purchasable, offers money to buy the dog.

Bhabha prefers hybridity to inversion as a Postcolonial strategy of resistance. Mimicry no doubt is a stronger mode of protest than inversion because it makes the colonizer's self-image unacceptable to him. But despite its subversive power, the divisive structure (the Centre-Other binary) cannot be dismantled through mimicry. However it is hybridity or cross-pollenization that changes the texture of the relation and levels down the binary by problematizing categorization, for the hybrid is neither a pure native nor a pure outsider. In her famous work, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* Gloria Anzaldua, therefore, not only glorifies mixed-ness for its power to disengage from the dominant culture but urges upon dismantling all types of borders, visible or invisible, that confuse selfhood:

To survive the Borderlands
You must live sin fronteras (without borders)
Be crossroads (Anzaldua 1987, 217)

That is why Walcott celebrates the mongrelity of the hybrid in 'The Schooner Flight':

I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
I had a sound colonial education,
I have Dutch, nigger and English in me,
and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation. (Walcott
1986, 40-43)

As colonizers are obsessed with purity and would often make the so called 'impurity' an excuse for discrimina-

tion, Postcolonial discourse encourages glorification of hybridity. The subtitle ‘The New Mestiza’ (meaning ‘the new mixed’) of Anzaldúa’s work *Borderlands* also points to this new space where all cultural borders collapse or cease to exist. One understands why the Mexican dramatist Rubén Sierra provocatively names one of his very famous plays *La Raza Pura* or the pure race—the ‘pure’ race in question being the Chicano/a whose blood is mixed—half native half Spanish.

Of the major comic tropes through which the anger, abhorrence and resentment of the subjugated/colonized is expressed, irony and humour are most important. Irony dwells in the contrived gap between the signifier and the signified and leaving a clue that the signifier cannot be taken literally. Hutcheon finds irony most suitable for inscribing Postcoloniality because it is ‘a trope of doubleness’, a “trope that works from within a power field but still contests it” (Hutcheon 1995, 134). In *Heart of Darkness* which is a serious novel for Postcolonial reading, the hollowness of the colonial control has been bantered through dexterous manipulation of the ironic trope which has been conceived comically. At the beginning of the novel Marlow waxes eloquent about the efficiency of the Europeans which distinguishes them from others: ‘What saves us is efficiency--the devotion to efficiency’ (Conrad 2001, 27). On his way to the central station he later on discovers that nothing is in order. One evening when a grass shed catches fire, most peo-

ple are indifferent to the fire accident while one tries to douse the fire using a tin pail ‘with a hole in the bottom of his pail’ (Conrad 2001, 45). Although the incident has been mentioned in passing, it punctures the European vanity about managerial efficiency.

The trope of humour which also makes use of mocking laughter is a weapon of contesting authority much stronger in power. Holoch rightly maintains that, “humor can also serve as a means of rebelling against power and authority, particularly when employed by powerless or oppressed individuals” (Holoch 2012, 22). It may be mentioned in passing that humour is a variety of the comic which consists in agreeable incongruity. The comic in humour often oozes from some absurdity of proposition, as exemplified by the following lines from Johnson:

To shake with laughter ere the jest they hear
 To pour at will the counterfeited tear
 And as their patron hints the cold or heat
 To shake in Dog days, in December sweat. (*London*
 141-144)

The very idea of someone responding to a joke even before hearing it is profusely funny, for it displays absence of sensibility through stupid hyper-responsiveness. Postcolonial texts teem with humour targeted against the authority. In his film *Hirak Rajar Deshe* (*In the Land of*

the Diamond King) Ray effects subversion of a tyrannical rule in a style that camouflages the seriousness of purpose with overdose of humour. The mannerism of the megalomaniac King impervious to the plight of his subjects, the ludicrous gestures of the King's ever-nodding yes-men, his cabinet of ministers, facetiously expose the anarchic rule that calls for overthrow. Ray makes a carnivalesque fusion of the sacred and the profane by using several Indian classical ragas in a frivolous song 'Paye Pori Bagh Mama' sung by Goopy and Bagha to cast a spell on the fierce Royal Bengal Tiger protecting the royal treasury. The film also humorously subverts the issue of domination by scientific means always preferred by fascist rulers. Here the machine is not a warhead but called jantarmantar, a blend of RSA and ISA, used to forcefully brainwash the subjects and ensure their consent in the continuance of despotic rule. The table is turned at the end when the king himself has a washing of his brain and in a scene involving Postcolonial mode of comic subversion the king joins hands with his subjects to pull down the statute of authority. Take another example. In *The Strange Man*, Amu Djoletto portrays a grim picture of post-colonial Ghana still writhing under several colonial burdens like the greed for money and profit-margin. The novelist uses humour to undermine civilizing myth of the colonizers. In the grave-digging episode that follows the death of Tete, while others are discussing the proximate causes of Tete's death, Ofori makes speculation about what he might be doing in his

afterlife: “I’m not surprised Tete is gone.... I wonder if people do sell in heaven, but if he has his way, he’s probably trying to sell trumpets to the angels by now at a smart profit” (Djoleto 1967, 6). The idea of selling trumpets to angels, although said in a humorous vein, puts to question the role of the colonizer which planted the profiteering mentality and polluted the native soul.

One major variety of the subversive comic in Postcolonial texts is the black humour. Black humour is not humour that makes light of the otherwise solemn subject matter but rather enhances its gravity by presenting it in a light hearted manner, by consciously rupturing the bond of form and content, of manner of presentation and the matter to be presented. Manjula Padmanabhan’s 1997 play *Harvest* which portrays a grim future of neo-colonial exploitation presents Postcolonial black humour at its best. Although the play is primarily focused on the power of wealth before which people of the Third World are almost helpless, it also uses black humour to travesty hegemonic power. Their economy shattered, the erstwhile colonies continue to be sucked by the First World even after independence. The wealthy elite of the First World take advantage of the poverty of the once colonized people for human organ trafficking. In the play Om, who has lost job enters into a contract with InterPlanta for selling his body-part in exchange of financial succor for his family. The First World turns to the Third World for organ not because it is under-pop-

ulated but because the organs of the First World people are too precious to be put on sale. When Om's mother says whether Ginni and his team who represent the First World have not 'enough of their own people' to donate organs, Om quips: "They don't have people to spare" (Padmanabhan 2001, 223). It may be apparently a jocular reply but it informs us that all rhapsody over human rights is sheer nonsense in a world of social inequality. The sarcasm in Om's remark is essentially Postcolonial, for he sneers at the authority responsible for the distress of the oppressed. The negotiation of the two worlds, wherein one must trace the Postcolonial space, is deeply disturbing despite the funny mode of dramatization. The poor in the Third World lack basic amenities of life. So they ignore the more serious issues like human rights and organ harvesting. This is evident from Ma's remark to Jeetu when InterPlanta constructs a private toilet for the family: "When you reach my age you'll know that a peaceful shit is more precious than money in the bank!" (Padmanabhan 2001, 231). On the other hand, Ginni and his team try to cloak their insidious intent under the garb of benevolence. They are over-anxious about the health of the donor Om not because they love him but because they want a healthy organ for transplantation. This horrible colonial motive has been pricked with a master-stroke of black humour: "if Awum's smiling, it means his body's smiling, and if his body's smiling, it means his organs are smiling. And that's the kind of organs that'll survive a transplant best" (Padmanabhan

2001, 229). In Ginni's pronunciation the family name of Om Prakash becomes Auwm Praycash: "Oh, my Gad! I see you! Is that really you? Auwm? Praycash?" The pronunciation of 'Om Prakash' as 'Auwm Praycash' is not just rollicking, but is fraught with Postcolonial significance. It reveals how colonial identity is disfigured by the colonizer. It also evokes the Neo-colonial state where the people of the Third World depend on the dole of the First World (*pray cash*) for survival.

In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o remarks: "The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (Thiong'o 2003, 9). Indeed, language has always been a site for Postcolonial resistance. The colonizers taught the native people their language for administrative expediency. Gradually due to several socio-political reasons, the foreign tongue came to occupy the central place in the colonies. For being the principal mode of communication, for being the mother tongue of multitudes, it was impossible to discard it as 'foreign'. After the independence, when the decolonizing process gained ground, language made the task problematic. What to do with this colonial legacy which is the mother tongue of many native people? To accept it is to step into the shoe of the colonizer; to overthrow it is to betray one's own self, which, as confessed by Chinua Achebe, 'produces a guilty feeling' (qtd in *Decolonizing the Mind* 2003, 9). The dilemma has been voiced by many Indian writers, from

Kamala Das to Sujata Bhatt. The Caribbean poet Derek Walcott focuses on the conflicting allegiance of the hybrid self in the following lines from his well-known poem 'A Far Cry from Africa':

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, who choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live? (Walcott 1986,
26–33)

While this is true, in Postcolonial discourse one finds several modes of de-glamourising the centrality of the language of the colonizer. In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati has ridiculed the morbid excesses of over-rating the language of the master in a number of ways. Baby Kochamma is so desperate to impose English on the twins that if ever they spoke in Malayalam, as punishment she would force them to make written commitment that they would always speak in English 'A hundred times each' (Roy 1998, 36). The incorrigible Anglophilia of Pappachi has been mocked by Ammu in terms of a funny abbreviation – he is a 'British CCP' (chi-chi-poach) which is an abuse meaning 'shit wiper' (Roy 1998, 51). Chacko explains to the twins that Anglophilia is so strong in Indian culture that even after independence

instead of decolonizing our minds we Indians “adore our conquerors and despise ourselves” (Roy 1998, 53). Although it is a legitimate criticism, Ammu smells hypocrisy in the remark, for Chako himself is wedded to a Western woman. Hence she quips sarcastically: “Marry our conquerors, is more like it” (Ibid). Through all these amusing details Arundhati Roy shows how ‘the reigning tongue’ (a term used by Gloria Anzaldua in *Borderlands*), can be appropriated and mutilated to create a Postcolonial resistant space.

But since “Master’s tool will never dismantle master’s house”, as held by Audre Lorde, (Lorde 2003, 25), Postcolonialism celebrates linguistic mongrelity which comically disfigures the colonizer’s stamp on the language as effectively as a broken glass distorts an image in reflection. Mongrelity makes the master’s own language sound comic as well as queer to the master. Paradoxically this is not adulteration but a creation that involves transgression of the boundaries set by the reigning tongue. In *Borderlands* in the Chapter ‘How to Tame a Wild Tongue’ Anzaldua identifies this linguistic feature as the singular space for constructing distinct emancipated identity. Of the many writers who have explored this Postcolonial scope of defying the code of the reigning tongue, the name of Linton Kwesi Johnson, the Jamaican-British poet deserves special mention. His poetry is recognizably political, for in his poems he often uses the theme of racist victimhood, the bitter experience of a black

Briton and a West-Indian descendant in London. But what is remarkable is his creative use of creolized English, a comic distortion of the King's/Queen's English. This hybrid form is powerful enough not to strike one as a mere parodic caricature and hence it has earned recognition of the linguistic mainstream. For example, in 'Inglan Is a bitch' he reveals the non-European's struggle for survival in a racist environment in a language that resembles English only in the pronunciation of some words:

well mi dhu day wok an' mi dhu nite wok
mi dhu clean wok an' mi dhu dutty wok
dem seh dat black man is very lazy
but it y'u si mi wok y'u woulda sey mi crazy (Johnson
2006, 35-38)

In his poems Johnson consciously makes funny use of the Jamaican Creole to defy the prescribed patterns of Standard English and also to create a unique resistant space for himself. Bhabha holds that liminality midwifes the emergence of a new hybrid identity. One concludes that this new Postcolonial identity has already been forged through comic distortion of what was once looked upon as inviolable and sacrosanct.

In his essay on Addison, C. S. Lewis praises the Addisonian art comic trivialization of the opponent as if it does not deserve attention at all, an art that is antipodean to the silly art of tilting at the windmill: "What we

might have been urged upon to attack as a fortress, we are tricked into admiring as a ruin” (Lewis 1979, 156). Lewis’s sentence sums up the art Postcolonial comic subversion which never hesitates to interrogate the centre of authority but knows the advantages of dismissing it with a depreciating smile. It is argued that “to rail is the sad privilege of the loser” (Ibid). True, laughter cannot alter real circumstances; it cannot de-center the subject or bring in a counter-discourse that can stop the cultural erasure of the colonized. Nevertheless, it can create a free space for the subject who discovers in the exercise of laughter his own strength of or counter-marginalizing the superpower by pulling down to the plane of the ridiculous. Laughter thus paves the way for disbanding colonial ideology which always precedes the political act of disbanding hegemonic rule, colonial or otherwise.

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